

Good Afternoon Committee Chairs and Members of the Committee, my name is Monique Russo (860) 833-4034. I reside in the town of Hebron, CT and I am an adoptive parent to three children of whom I originally met while employed at an inner city shelter. I am here today to testify on House/Senate Bill 5120, An Act Concerning Postsecondary Tuition Assistance and Special Need Subsidies for Adopted Children. I am here in support of the bill. House/Senate Bill HB 5120 will...

- Offer my children the same educational opportunities awarded to other State of Connecticut children that share a similar history. Our adoption became permanent in April of 2004. The college tuition assistance was approved several months after and only approved children for eligibility if they were adopted after December of 2004. Based on an eight month discrepancy my three children have been ruled in eligible. Their personal histories are no different than any of the current eligible children. They have been simply eliminated for eligibility strictly based on the previous date established for eligibility.
- I am a single mother of three adoptive biological children. Currently the active bill does not take any household dynamics into consideration. If one child was adopted after 12/04 to a two parent income household, this child would be eligible for the college tuition assistance regardless of the total household income or how many other children reside in the household. I am asking that this committee take into consideration the overall dynamics within a household. I am a single parent of three, living off of a single income but my children have been ruled in eligible for any tuition assistance. These current eligibility guidelines are neither fair nor equitable for the children eliminated based on a specified date or to the adoptive parents whose income and total dependants within the household are never taken into consideration when factoring in the eligibility criteria for assistance.
- My daughter, my two sons and their Grandmother sit next me. As a family we discussed their participation in this public hearing today. As a parent I am very proud that we sit before you today, as a family, advocating collectively regarding their futures. Although my children have been through much adversity within their short life time, it has not stopped them from striving to be the best young adults, citizens, friends, sons and daughters they can be. For many years they lived within a foster care system where they felt different and not worthy of parental, educational or societal attention based solely on environmental factors they have had no control over. They have worked very hard to overcome these adversities and have challenged themselves to become productive students, athletes and valued members of our society.
- Based on previous testimony from earlier years we have learned that many children who were or are currently eligible for the post secondary tuition assistance have not chosen to utilize this opportunity. My children that sit before you today have worked very hard to be in a position now to further their education. We ask for your support in passing this bill to afford them an opportunity to continue their efforts in striving to achieve their college degree and professional dreams. If we are successful in achieving these goals they will become the first members of their biological family to ever graduate from college. This achievement will also then help them break from the cycle of poverty, incarceration, drug addiction and unemployment that has run prevalent within their biological family for many generations prior.
- On a short professional note, as a member of the law enforcement community for over sixteen years, I cannot emphasize enough the value of an education for children that come from these disadvantaged backgrounds. Their success is not only measured by their personal accomplishments but by their future productivity and contributions to society as a whole.
- In closing, I ask you to please not allow a child to be discriminated against simply on a predetermined eligibility date. I have been told by many different employees from the Department of Children and Families that our family represents a success story within the State of Connecticut and this foster care system. However, despite this fact my children have been unfairly eliminated from this assistance based on criteria they have had no control over. A child that is a product of our great State of Connecticut should demand more respect and consideration from us as a society. I ask that you afford every adoptive child the same post secondary tuition opportunities regardless of their final adoption dates.